

# The Builder.

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THE work which has been recently published by Mr. T. Hudson Turner, called, "Some Account of Domestic Architecture in England, from the Conquest to the End of the Thirteenth Century,"\* contains much curious information, and shows, amongst other things, how slowly improvements go on, and what little advance has really been made since the last-named period: in some respects, indeed, there has been positive retrogression. The work consists of 287 pages, and contains a large number of engravings. Although it purports to commence from the Conquest, the author sketches, in his introduction, the progress of domestic architecture in England previously, so far as the scanty materials to be found will serve. The villas and town houses of the Roman colonists were generally built on the same plan that prevailed in Italy,—the Roman and all other people copied one another, and changes, more apparent to us than themselves, were made imperceptibly and at long intervals,—and he does not consider that domestic architecture was carried to any considerable pitch of refinement by the Romans in England. Some of the remains of villas (with pavements and wall decorations) found in this country would justify a better opinion in this respect than Mr. Turner entertains: foundations have been opened indicating buildings of great extent and magnificence. That the multitude were ill-lodged we agree with him in believing; and in this respect it is, namely, the extension to the many of advantages enjoyed by the few, that advance has been made in modern times. When the Saxon came, he found better buildings than he had been used to, or than he was able to imitate when others were needed. A hall for feasting his retainers was his great need: this was mostly built of wood and thatched with reeds, or roofed with wooden shingles. The fire was kindled in the centre, and the lord and his "beorthmen" (expressive term), sat by it while the meal was there cooked.

The reader of Saxon history will remember the beautiful comparison made of one of King Edwin's chieftains in the discussion of the reception to be given to the missionary Paulinus, and which was recently quoted by Mr. Wright in the *Art-Journal*. "The present life of man, O king," he says, "seems to me, in comparison of that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the hall where you sit at your meal in winter, with your chiefs and attendants, warmed by a fire made in the middle of the hall, whilst storms of rain or snow prevail without: the sparrow, flying in at one door, and immediately out at another, whilst he is visible is safe from the wintry storm; but after this short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight into the dark winter from which he had emerged."

Internally the walls of the hall were covered

with hangings or tapestry, which were called in Anglo-Saxon *web-trapel*, or *web-rift*, wall clothing. These appear sometimes to have been mere plain cloths, but at other times they were richly ornamented, and not unfrequently embroidered with historical subjects.

During the greater part of the Saxon period houses were generally built of wood, and a carpenter is described as "making houses and bowls." London, indeed, was mainly a city of wood up to the Great Fire of 1666.

Saxon buildings doubtless exhibited some coarse decorative features:—

"The introduction of painting is commonly said, on the authority of Bede, to have taken place in the seventh century; but his words may be understood to refer only to the northern parts of the kingdom: indeed, it is probable they allude simply to the first application of that species of decoration to ecclesiastical buildings. It is obvious that people who possessed a sufficient knowledge of colours to enable them to paint one class of objects were likely to apply the same skill to another; and it seems incontestable that the Saxons painted their vessels in very remote times. That exterior ornaments were sometimes given to domestic buildings in Saxon times, scarcely admits of doubt: the 'pinnacled hall' is a phrase which occurs in the poem of *Beowulf*: from another passage in the same work, we may gather that the roof of a Saxon hall had a high pitch, and was sometimes covered with a better material than thatch: 'he went to the hall, stood on the steps, and beheld the steep roof with gold adorned.' It hardly admits of reasonable doubt, however, that some edifices, both ecclesiastical and domestic, were built during the latter centuries of Saxon dominion, of stone, and in imitation of the Roman, or rather Romanesque style."

Mr. Turner does not attach much importance to the drawings on Saxon MSS. as authorities:—

"Notwithstanding the great difference in style perceptible among them, it is obvious that the artists generally worked after certain admitted standards of design, which seem to have been furnished originally by the Greek school, to which later additions were made from time to time. This conventional style of drawing lasted till the twelfth century; and there is little difference between the architectural details in works of that age and those which occur in writings two centuries older. Occasionally also we may perceive a strong tinge of Saracenic character in Saxon delineations of buildings: this may be remarked, particularly in a drawing representing the Annunciation, in the celebrated Benedictional of St. Ethelwold, where the blessed Virgin is seated under a porch, covered by a dome, wholly in the Arabian style.\* On the other hand, many of the architectural decorations in the same manuscript, as the acanthus-leaved capitals and bases of columns, are drawn with a grace and freedom to which there could have been no parallel in any English building extant, when those drawings were made, in the latter half of the tenth century. Still, although too much credit is not to be given to early illuminations, they frequently present minor details which were undoubtedly taken by the artists from objects which surrounded them; and the impression left on the mind, by a careful comparison of various examples, will be, that much of the Romanesque style prevailed in some domestic buildings erected in this country in the ninth and tenth centuries. Indeed, it is not easy to perceive that a substantially-built Saxon hall could have materially differed from a Norman hall of the same period, any more than a Saxon house could have differed in its arrangement from a Norman house. The chief difference was, probably, that the latter had an upper story, a feature which seems to have been uncommon in England until late in the twelfth century."

When speaking of the absence of a chimney

in Saxon drawings, he says, "that useful invention appears to have been then unknown in England, as indeed it was in many parts of Europe, until the fifteenth century." The chimney, however, cannot be said to have been unknown in England till that date, or indeed several centuries before, as Mr. Turner himself afterwards points out, but although known it was used only in special cases. Most of our readers remember the fire-places and chimneys in Rochester Castle (twelfth century), at the Castle, Hedingham, Essex, and numerous other places. Thus, in a very interesting series of extracts, from records called the "*Liberate Rolls*," preserved in the Tower of London, which are given by Mr. Turner at the end of his book, and which refer to the architectural works, &c. executed by order of Henry III. (1216 to 1272), the orders for the erection of chimneys constantly occur. For example, in 1236, the king orders the sheriff of Wiltshire to "cause a certain penthouse to be made (at Clarendon), from our queen's chamber unto the said queen's wardrobe, which is beneath the new chapel, and a chimney in the same wardrobe;" and in the same year he tells Walter de Burgh to "make a certain penthouse, with a chimney, at the head of our hall at Brill." Again, in 1238, he tells his bailiff "to make a certain chimney in our great wardrobe at Woodstock;" and so throughout the records.

The Normans applied the Roman manner of building to their more important houses, as well as to ecclesiastical structures,—to which the Saxons had perhaps confined it. They continued to build town-houses of wood and clay:—stone houses of this period, such as we know of at Lincoln (the "*Jew's House*") and Barnack, were exceptions rather than examples of the general manner of constructing dwellings. Of their materials for building our author says:—

"The stone quarries which appear to have been most generally used in the twelfth and following century, were those of Caen, Boulogne, Pevensey, Corfe, Reigate, Folkstone, and that of Egremont, in Cumberland. There were of course numerous other quarries which were used for buildings in their immediate neighbourhood, but those mentioned above supplied materials to all parts of the kingdom. Thus parts of Windsor Castle were built of Egremont stone, both in the reigns of Henry the Second and of Edward the Third: considering the difficulty and expense of bringing it by sea in those early times, this material would appear to have been then greatly esteemed: at present it is believed the Egremont quarries are scarcely known in the south of England. The stone commonly called '*Kentish-rag*' was, under the same name, extensively used early in the thirteenth century: in 1282 the gaol of Newgate was repaired with '*Kentish-rag*;' at that time a boat-load of it cost from 7s. 8d. to 11s. 7d. The material used for finishing, and for the mullions of windows, is usually termed *free-stone*, and was brought, in all probability, from Corfe. Caen stone appears to have been mainly employed for ashlar-work, as at the present time. The *free-stone* of Maidenstone, or Maidstone, occurs in one record of this period, relating to a private building in London."

In the thirteenth century lime was sold by the bag as well as by the hundred-weight: in preparing it for mortar it was mixed with

\* In this year the king orders the constable of the Tower "to cause the walls of our queen's chamber, which is within our chamber, at the aforesaid Tower, to be whitewashed and painted, and within these paintings to be painted with flowers; and cause the drain of our private chamber to be made in the fashion of a hollow column, as our well-beloved servant John of Ely shall more fully tell thee."

\* Oxford and London: J. H. Parker, 1851.

\* *Archæologia*, vol. xxiv. pl. x. p. 80.